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NSC Letter, 12-24-11
By: JK NARS, Date: 11/11

1/11 ^{see} copy to Mrs. ^{Swick} for JFK ^{file}

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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

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Discussion at NSC meeting June 29, 1961

1. The meeting began with a discussion of security control of documents of high sensitivity. The President expressed his great concern about leaks of information which had already occurred with respect to Berlin planning, and expressed his displeasure at the number of copies of the Acheson report in circulation. After some discussion he directed that the matter of circulation of such documents be reviewed by the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of CIA, and Mr. Bundy.

The President made it clear that he was speaking not of ordinary documents relating to ordinary problems, but to such unusually sensitive papers as, for example, the Acheson report and the record of his conversation with Khrushchev.

2. Kuwait - The Secretary of State opened a discussion of Kuwait by saying that the situation was critical and that decisions might be called for soon.

There was a brief but careful discussion in which the great interests of the West in Kuwait were noted, and there was concurrence in the view that the Secretary of State could give reassurance to Lord Home on both points.

3. Berlin - The Secretary of State gave a summary account of the current state of the Department's work on the aide memoire, on briefing books and on international and other immediate aspects of Berlin planning. He then asked Mr. Acheson to discuss his report. Mr. Acheson did just that. In addition, the following significant comments were made by Mr. Acheson: he gave special emphasis to the idea of the trust of Berlin and the peace which exists there, and argued that the real themes should be that Khrushchev is a false trustee and a war monger, and these themes should be hammered home.

The President asked whether really it was to our advantage to press the argument for unification, feeling that our position lacks appeal. Mr. Acheson argued that this position should not be abandoned but he did not wholly convert the President until the Secretary of State reminded him that self-determination is a better ground than unification, a position Mr. Acheson cheerfully accepted.

The President asked about the value of a plebiscite in Berlin and after general agreement that such a plebiscite would be useful, the Department of State was asked to concert a plan for discussion of such an enterprise with the Germans in appropriate ways, since the initiative ought to come from them.

The President questioned Mr. Acheson about the reciprocal effect of military build-ups on each side. Mr. Acheson agreed that this is a most important point and that planning should be so arranged as to avoid such back and forth challenges as far as possible.

Mr. Acheson made clear his own doubt that interference with civilian traffic will be an early step by the Soviets. Mr. Dillon later noted that in earlier Berlin planning this interference had been rated as a very grave danger and asked what Mr. Acheson's specific recommendation was in such a case. Mr. Acheson, reiterating his feeling that the Russian's own propaganda made such a move difficult now, said that in the event that such an interference did occur, he would propose an attempt at air lift and a prompt resort to other measures described in his report.

Admiral Burke made plain his opposition to the scale of the "probe" recommended by Mr. Acheson and his opposition also to an airlift unconnected with a probe. In reply to the first point, Mr. Acheson emphasized his belief that

The President noted the difficulty of sustaining a strong political posture and posed the question, as an example, of finding the right answer if Khrushchev proposes a Summit this summer. Mr. Acheson, remarking that it is hard to answer any specific proposal ahead of time, nevertheless believed that it would not be hard to find answers as we go along. In reply to a summit proposal, for example, the President could readily suggest that:

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conversations be undertaken first at a lower level. Mr. Acheson believed that there were plenty of "elderly unemployed" people like himself who could be sent to interminable meetings. He thought it important to understand that we could converse indefinitely without negotiating at all, and that he assorted that he could readily do this himself for three months on end.

Mr. Dillon raised the question of possible domestic economic effects of a mounting crisis and of a possible need for legislation to give the President necessary powers. In reply the President asked him to assume the leadership of a study of this problem.

It was decided not to make substantive decisions on the basis of this first discussion, and the President directed Mr. Bundy, in consultation with Mr. Kohler and others, to prepare a list of departmental assignments which might be carried forward in preparation for further discussion and appropriate decision in two weeks.

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4. Laos - The Secretary of State presented an outline of the current situation in Laos, closely following a memorandum sent over from the Department of State. It was agreed that appropriate encouragement should be given to Phoumi and that he should be given to understand that there are points at which the United States will intervene to prevent a Communist Laos this summer. On the other hand, these points must be measured and decided by the United States and not by Phoumi, and accordingly, careful instructions will need to be sent to Ambassador Brown, and Phoumi must be encouraged to stay in close touch with the Ambassador. There was also agreement that efforts should be made to improve our communication and understanding with Souvanna, and in particular General Gavin is to be instructed to press him again in this direction.